

1 issue on people's minds today—what it costs to fill up one's automobile or sports utility vehicle with gasoline.

In my case, like many other fathers with young children, we have a minivan. When we go to the pump now, it is somewhere between \$40 and \$50 to fill up our tank. There seems to be a pattern in our region—Michigan, Illinois, and some of the other States in the Great Lakes—that have driven the prices even higher than the national average. I share the concerns my colleague from Michigan and colleague from Illinois have expressed with respect to why this is affecting uniquely our State. I have asked the Secretary of Energy to meet personally on this issue to find out what insights he provides.

I think a few other issues need to be discussed. First, I think the points that have been raised with respect to releasing some of the petroleum in our strategic reserve make sense. This is a way to make an immediate impact, to have an immediate impact on the supply of oil which, in turn, will relate to the price. There are a lot of things we can do that will have a long-term impact, but the short-term impact is fairly limited.

No. 1, we can tap the reserve. No. 2, we can suspend, as we have on several occasions tried to vote to do, the Federal gasoline taxes to reduce some of the costs the consumers are paying.

But I think there is an issue we need to talk about as well, that has more of a long-term consideration to it, and that is the dependency of our country on foreign sources of energy. The fact is, even if you level out the prices for the Great Lakes, if the problems in our region were to be resolved in such a fashion that we simply returned to the approximate level of the rest of the country, we would still be paying substantially higher prices than we did a year ago. There is no question the reason for that is the OPEC nations' decisions with respect to supply is the cause of these higher prices. While I think we should investigate whether it is the oil companies or anyone else who may be taking advantage of the supply situation in some inappropriate way, I think we must try to wean ourselves from the dependency we have on foreign energy sources.

I believe we have a responsibility as a Congress to work on issues related to this.

I believe the administration has a responsibility, which it has not fulfilled in over 7 years in office, to provide us with a long-term energy policy that prevents dependency from getting any worse. In the 1970s, when we had an energy crisis that led to lines at the fuel pumps, that led to shortages, we were only 35-percent dependent on foreign energy. Today, we are 55-percent dependent. At the current rate, we will hit 60 percent in the near future.

There is no question that if we place ourselves in that position, we will be at the mercy of the decisionmaking of

foreign countries with respect to our energy costs. I do not think we want to be in that position as a nation. I do not think we want to have our Energy Secretary, irrespective of to which administration he or she might belong, be forced to go hat in hand, as Secretary Richardson recently was required to do, to persuade foreign countries to give America a little bit more of a supply. The only way to address that is to change policies at home that allow for domestic production to increase that will permit us to tap into alternative energy sources and to conserve more energy.

That, I believe, ought to occupy as much attention as anything else we do in this area. To address the long-term needs, in my judgment, is the top energy policy on which we should right now be focused as a Congress and as a nation.

We need a multifaceted approach. In the short run, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve can give us immediate relief on some of the prices. I believe we should, again, consider suspending the gas tax as another way to do that for the short run. Until and unless we demonstrate as a nation a commitment to increasing our own domestic production, we are going to send a signal to these other nations that they are going to have the leverage they can use when they wish to make more profits for themselves at our expense, and instead of American consumers being in charge, it will be foreign oil ministers who make those decisions.

That is wrong. I intend to fight that, and I intend to be back on the floor as much as it takes on these issues until we begin to focus on that aspect of the problem.

Let's say the national average in the region—which does not include Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois—if that average fuel price was the price in my State, \$1.50 to \$1.60 a gallon, it would still be too high, in my opinion. The only way it is going to change is if we address the long-term issues as well.

I thank the Senator from Maine for her amendment and her efforts. I look forward to working with her on this issue. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

AMENDMENT NO. 3439 WITHDRAWN

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Michigan. He is absolutely right in that we need to pursue a long-term energy policy for this Nation, as well as to provide short-term price relief by tapping our Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

I thank all my colleagues who have supported and have spoken out in support of this resolution, but particularly my primary sponsor of the legislation, Senator SCHUMER of New York. Since a point of order will lie against the amendment, I ask unanimous consent that my amendment be withdrawn.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The amendment is withdrawn.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FITZGERALD). Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE ACT

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I mention this only because I know we were in a quorum call and, being in a quorum call, this time would not be taken from the bill. The House of Representatives has passed overwhelmingly—I think with only four votes against it—the Electronic Signature Act. We will be taking it up in a matter of hours. I will speak further on this on the floor today, but I strongly urge my colleagues to vote for this bill.

A number of us worked closely—Republicans and Democrats alike—to craft the final package. I was one of the conferees and signed the conference report—indeed I also signed and supported the earlier report based on the agreement we achieved before the last recess weeks ago. I think that it is a good piece of legislation. I think it should pass. It includes consumer protections and balance that were lacking from the House-passed bill and builds upon the narrower provisions of the Senate-passed bill to include some additional provisions regarding record retention.

Originally, there were some who wanted to pass a digital signature bill almost for the sake of passing one. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed in both parties but also among the industry. I think most of those in the various industries that will be affected, who want an electronic signature bill, realize they have to have something that would have consumer protection in it. Otherwise, we could see companies that do not have a strong sense of consumer ethics misuse the bill. The public reaction would be such that a subsequent Congress would wipe out all the gains we made.

What has happened now is we have written in good protections. The best companies, those companies that value their reputation and are in for the long haul, will follow these rules without any hesitation. But companies that may think of this as a chance to make profits—sudden profits—from people who are not computer literate, people who are just coming across the digital divide, they will be stopped from preying on the innocent.

I think it is a good piece of legislation, as I said. A number of us, Republicans and Democrats, worked very hard on this. Now we do have a good bill. In the Senate, Chairman MCCAIN and Senator HOLLINGS, Senator HATCH and I and Senator GRAMM and Senator

SARBANES all participated in this conference, and from the House, Chairman BLILEY and Congressman DINGELL, worked to put this together. On our side Senator WYDEN made significant contributions, as well.

I urge, when this does come to the Senate floor, that it be passed, I hope unanimously.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. DOMENICI and Mr. BINGAMAN pertaining to the introduction of S. 2736 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2001—Continued

AMENDMENT NO. 3430

(Purpose: To provide for an additional payment from the surplus to reduce the public debt)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. ALLARD. I have an amendment at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Colorado [Mr. ALLARD], for himself and Mr. VOINOVICH, Mr. GRAMS, and Mr. ENZI, proposes an amendment numbered 3430.

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

On page _____, after line _____, insert the following:

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
BUREAU OF THE PUBLIC DEBT
SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION FOR FISCAL
YEAR 2000
GIFTS TO THE UNITED STATES FOR REDUCTION
OF THE PUBLIC DEBT

For deposit of an additional amount for fiscal year 2000 into the account established under section 3113(d) of title 31, United States Code, to reduce the public debt, \$12,200,000,000.

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is not a sufficient second at this time.

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I renew my request for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, the amendment that was just reported at

the desk is an amendment that is co-sponsored by myself, Senator VOINOVICH, Senator GRAMS, and Senator ENZI. I do want to take the time to thank them for their willingness to be a part of this very important effort to try to pay down our Nation's debt. We have two debts that are referred to frequently in debate, and I want to talk about each one of them individually. One is the burden of the national debt on America, and, as of June 14, 2000, the total national debt to the penny was \$5,651,368,584,663.04.

If we look at the debt that was owed to the public, there is an equally astounding figure of \$3,499,251,116,128.15.

How does this break down to each citizen's share of the national debt? If you were born today, what kind of debt would you have to face as you grew and paid for your education and started your own business and raised your family? Each citizen born today in America would owe \$20,550 on the national debt; or another way of putting it, \$12,724 on the debt owed to the public.

In 1961, Congress established within the Department of the Treasury the Bureau of the Public Debt, an account for citizens to repay the public debt. Our amendment is an attempt to accomplish just that. What it does, it makes a one-time payment out of the fiscal year 2000 surplus—that is the budget we are operating under right now—to the account. We have a total of about 26.5 billion surplus dollars that have come in this year. We have already obligated about \$14.3 billion in an effort for emergency spending.

This includes some adjustments between spending provisions we did last year where we forwarded some of our spending. We are going to move it back so it is within each fiscal year. It included some emergency spending for Kosovo and some emergency spending for farm programs and a number of other items. That leaves \$12.2 billion on the table. So this amendment says we want to take those \$12.2 billion and move them into the debt repayment account that Americans can pay into now, that we established in 1961.

This holds the Senate accountable for limited emergency supplemental spending consistent with the budget, I might add. I think each of us individually in the Senate, and Members of the House, ought to make a personal commitment to try to enforce provisions of that budget. That was voted on by this body, voted out of the body. If it is going to mean anything, I think Members of the Senate have to make a concerted effort to help enforce the provisions of the budget.

The amendment I have introduced, with the help of some of my colleagues, was scored by CBO as a no-cost intergovernmental transfer. It is well within the budget rules, the rules of the Senate, and it is an important amendment. It is something we need to address. We simply have to get the debt under control. I have introduced legislation in the past that has put forth a

plan whereby we try to pay down the debt over 30 years, then, later on, introduced more legislation so we go ahead and pay down the debt over 20 years.

The fact is, we are having unprecedented surpluses coming in to the Government coffers. A lot of it is because of the amount of work and labor that is happening out there. It is due to American initiative that has been propelled by the free enterprise society in which we live. It is unprecedented in the history of this country.

If we do not do something to pay down the debt now, we are going to miss a great opportunity to have a secure, a more prosperous future for the young Americans of today, our future leaders.

I hope we can adopt this amendment as a minor first step in paying down our total debt. We simply should not, as a matter of conscience, continue to increase spending year after year with a total disregard of the total debt that we have accumulated. We simply need to be doing something to pay down our national debt.

This is a small step. It is something that hopefully will begin to get this Senate to understand and this Congress to realize we ought to have a plan of 20 years to pay down the debt. It is accountability on further emergency spending. Emergency spending is not counted in the budget caps and the 302(b) allocations, and too often this spending privilege is abused. Members of the House and Senate try to put programs which they cannot put in the regular budget resolution when this Congress sets its priorities under the emergency spending programs. We need to do what we can to maintain the integrity of that budget resolution because it is the one that puts restraint on spending and puts accountability in the budgeting process.

As I mentioned before, CBO has scored this as a no-cost transfer. It is important, and it is money that is left laying on the table. At this point in time, I really believe there are few choices of what will happen with the \$12.2 billion. It will either go toward debt repayment, or it will be spent. I am concerned it will be spent.

I have introduced this legislation to obligate it towards debt repayment. It is important. I ask my colleagues in the Senate to support us in the effort to pay down the debt, and I ask them to vote aye to support this amendment to pay down the debt. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. VOINOVICH. Mr. President, my colleague from the State of Colorado did a very good job outlining for us how important it is that we address our national debt. There is a euphoria in America today over the fact that we have a tremendous surplus. Unfortunately, the fact that we have a surplus reminds me of a Dean Martin song that went something like "Money burns a hole in my pocket." Everyone is trying